DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 489 EC 130 151

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TITLE Conflict Resolution in the IEP Process.
INSTITUTION Southwest Regional Resource Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.
SPONS AGENCY Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Mar 80
CONTRACT 300-78-0016
NOTE 34p.: Print is light and may not reproduce well.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Conflict Resolution: *Disabilities: Elementary Secondary Education: *Individualized Education Programs: Models: Parent Role: *Parent School Relationship: *Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

The paper is an outgrowth of a Utah task force composed of school personnel and parents examining conflict in the individualized education program (IEP) process for handicapped children. An introductory section examines the history of parent-school relations, reviews the steps in the IEP process, and describes such conflict resolution strategies as win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win. Implications of each strategy are noted. Four steps in a problem solving model are described: problem identification and definition, solution generation, solution evaluation, and solution decision. (CI)

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Conflict Resolution in the IEP Process

March, 1980

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Prepared for

the Utah Task Force
on
Conflict Resolution in the IEP Process

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EC130151

Contract No. OEC-300-78-0016

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Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
U.S. Office of Education
Department of Health, Education and Welfare

Foreword

With the advent of recent state and federal regulations governing the education of handicapped children and youth, many new terms have found their way into the everyday vocabularies of parents, teachers and school administrators--terms such as prior notice, informed parent consent, impartial due process hearings, etc. These terms and others describe activities that occur at points where parents and educators interact regarding specific educational programs for handicapped children and youth.

Such interactions may occure with relatively little friction, or they may lead to strong disagreements between the parties. Both state and federal regulations outline procedures that may be followed should parents and school personnel reach an impasse in the planning activities. These procedures--impartial due process hearings, administrative reviews and judicial action--are formalized methods to resolve problems that have led to open conflict between parents and school personnel.

The Special Education Section, Utah State Office of Education, requested that the Southwest Regional Resource Center (SRRC) help develop a practical method for school personnel to use to facilitate quality, nonadversarial relations with parents. As the first step toward meeting this request, the SRRC invited a group of participants and a parent representative to form a task force to examine and discuss conflict between parents and educators.

Brent C. Page and Stevan J. Kukic wrote a paper on conflict resolution, using the discussion that had occured in the task force meeting and extensive research of the literature on problem solving. Members of the task force met again to critique the paper; with the editorial assistance of Jean J. Moore, the paper was revised as suggested by task force members.

The Special Education Section and the SRRC acknowledge the wisdom and perspective brought by task force members to help develop the concepts presented here, and hope that this paper will bring new meaning to the term conflict resolution. Task force members were:

Foreword (continued)

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Conflict Resolution in the IEP Process

Introduction

Parent involvement in education is a rather timeless topic that has been extensively treated in the literature for decades. Indeed, parents have always maintained a role in the public education system, albeit a changing one. McAfee and Vergason (1979) have described the nature of the pre-World War II parent-school relationships in terms of a number of social factors:

> 1. Most communities were relatively stable and parents passed their relationships with schools down to their children.
> 2. Teachers and administrators were an integral part of the community, and many of them returned to teach in the schools that had provided their own educations.
> 3. Schools were an integral part of the neighborhood; they often functioned as the recreational and social center of the community.
> 4. The community had relatively homogeneous values, and teachers' values were reflected in the values of the community as a whole.
> 5. Parents and schools had an understanding or "implied contract." Parents viewed education as the means by which the lives of their children would be improved. Thus, they sent their children to school inculcated with respect for and awe of education.
> 6. The management structure reflected the desires of the community. (p.1)

McAfee and Vergason continue, describing changes in this parent-school relationship and, importantly, educator's reactions to the emerging parent-school conflict:

> The advent of increased mobility fractured the stability and utility of these relationships and axioms. Schools came to be more frequently administered by professional educators who were not identified with the community. Teachers in inner city schools often commuted from the

> surrounding suburbs. Now, the educational values of the school may not reflect those of the students, their parents, or the community. Children who are bused from various locales meet the same clash of values. The difference in values may be real or perceived, but its effect is supported by differences in attire, appearance, recreation habits, and other variables. Communities have been changing rapidly in socioethnic composition — and values and expectations reflect the egress and influx of socioethnic groups. Educators have discovered that the manner in which they teach is no longer effective. The implied contract is no longer viewed similarly by parent and teacher.
>
> The impact of large numbers of previously segregated exceptional children entering public schools has created similar problems. Educators can no longer sell the majority view to parents and children whose needs, goals, and desires are different. <u>The onus, then, is on educators to develop a new relationship — one suited to the present situation</u>.
>
> Educators and parents have not failed to recognize these new sources of conflict. What educators have done, however, is to attempt to convince parents that the values and expertise of the educational system is more desirable and more effective than anything the parents have to offer. Thus, the majority of parent involvement programs have taken the form of training parents to deal with the special needs of their children (p.2, emphasis added).

As one examines the context from which the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) orignates, it is clear that it is more than only educational legislation. It has common roots with civil rights legislation and the same rationale as landmark Supreme Court decisions which have decreed segregation to be harmful and thus unconstitutional. Therefore, the implications

of this law require not only educational reforms, but social, political and economic reforms as well (Corrigan, 1978).

What education presently faces is a strained relationship with parents--with a legislative overlay which mandates a process of parent-school interactions. But the real parent-school relationship is not specified by law, although the law may provide the impetus to bring about change. The real and meaningful parent-school relationship can only develop from a situation in which there is a reexamination of values, attitudes and goals and a redefinition of each party's responsibility for the appropriate education of the child.

The IEP Process

PL 94-142 requires that every child receiving special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Moreover, it specifies that such an IEP will be developed in a meeting attended by a representative of the local education agency, the child's teacher, parent(s) of the child, and, if appropriate, the child. Other persons, if deemed necessary, may also attend. The IEP is to contain judgments of the child's current performance levels, and the specifications of annual goals with short-term instructional objectives, special education and related services to be provided, the extent to which the child will participate in the regular classroom, specifics about service delivery dates and

duration, criteria for short-term evaluations and provisions for at least an annual review of progress and (at least) a three year reassessment of the child for continuing eligibility.

The process of developing the individualized program is one in a series of steps that are required by the law. A generic flowchart of the required steps in the IEP process is presented in Figure 1 (p. 5). In this diagram are noted the specific points at which parents must be involved as specified in the federal regulations and/or Utah State regulations. However, to insure appropriate delivery of services to handicapped children, parents should be actively involved at each step of the process.

The first step in the IEP process is identification of potentially handicapped students. Such referrals may come from a variety of sources, as indicated in the flowchart in Figure 1. Once a child is referred, both federal and state regulations require that parents provide written informed consent for a more comprehensive assessment. Following the assessment phase, a meeting is held to determine eligibility for services. State regulations require the involvement of parents. Once eligibility is determined, an IEP is developed which addresses the child's identified needs with a

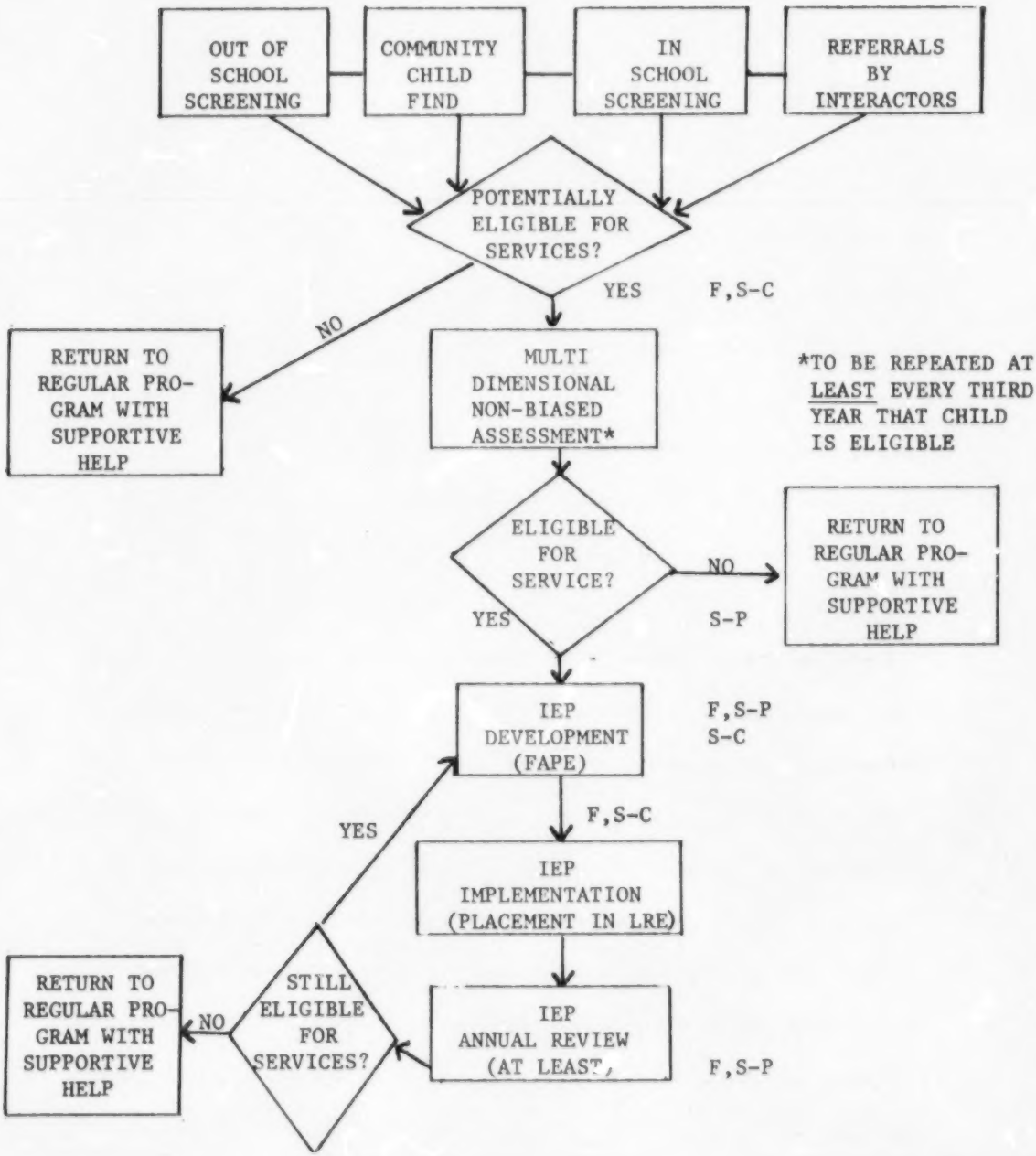

Fig. 1. Child Centered Process for Delivering Special Education Services

F-Federal regulations
S-State regulations
C-Written informed consent from parents
P-Parent participation

written, comprehensive plan. State regulations demand further that an IIP (Individualized Implementation Plan) be a part of the IEP specifying responsibility, materials, methods, etc., for the child's program. Placement, with informed parent consent, is then made in the appropriate least restrictive environment and provisions are made for review of progress at least at yearly intervals. Both state and federal regulations require schools to actively solicit parent involvement in the IEP development and annual review.

Two interrelated responses may be made to the requirements of PL 94-142. One is the immediate response required to deal with the conflicts which may be inevitable, based on the findings that parents and schools may disagree. These two parties with differing values, responsibilities and perhaps a recent history of strained relationships, are legally required to work together as members of a team. The second, and most crucial response, would be a long-term one: "bringing parents along," and its parallel, "bringing educators along," have been suggested as phrases to describe this latter response.

This paper is devoted to a description of the immediate approach; the latter part of this paper specifically discusses the problems of working through conflicts in the IEP process. However, it seems appropriate to at least address some general issues in bringing parents and educators along.

"Bringing parents along" and its correlary, "bringing educators along" may be synthesized into the phrase "bringing educators and parents together." Presently parents are often viewed by the schools as junior partners, passive and undemanding in their roles, or as aggressive and unreasonable in their demands. Educators also sometimes view the school as professional territory in which parents ought not to involve themselves--especially not in a coequal role. In "bringing educators and parents together," several things must occur. Educators must be more open and willing to listen to parents. Parents must assume some responsibility for the educational process of their children. (It should be noted that PL 94-142 provides for a contract for services that binds only one party--the school. Parents have no mandated role which can be enforced.)

Parents must deal responsibly within the realities of the day-to-day operation of the educationl system. For example, one of the realities is fiscal limitations. If parents are demanding costly and complex programs to meet the educational needs of their handicapped child, they must also be aware of (1) the district's commitment to provide those programs, (2) the process the district must go through to secure the services, and (3) the legal mandate of the schools to provide an <u>appropriate</u> program, based on the child's needs.

Parents exert the single most important influence in the development of their children. Those who do not feel a part of

the educational system often will work against it in some way. Merely teaching parents about education does not guarantee their support; they must share in the responsibility for the educational success of their children. In the past, this responsibility has been fragmented: parents have had responsibility when the child was at home, and educators have had responsibility when the child was at school. McAfee and Vergason (1979) suggest three issues that must be addressed in bringing parents and educators together: (1) How can education structure the relationship between parents and schools so that both sides pull their weight toward the same child-centered goals? (2) How can parents assume their responsibility in the educational success of their children? (3) How can education regain the support of the community?

If parents and educators are brought along appropriately they will form a team, coequal in responsibility and commitment, different in roles and functions, and both behaving responsibly within the constraints of reality.

Conflict

Following is a consideration of various issues relating to conflict and its resolution by the original parties within the context of the IEP process. Conflict may be broadly defined to include both disagreements over substantive issues as well as interpersonal antagonisms. It may include conflicts due to miscommunitcation or lack of information, which are relatively easy

to resolve. It may include disagreements about significant substantive issues and/or a difference of attitudes and values, both of which are most difficult to satisfactorily resolve.

Merry and Allerhand (1977) describe the process of resolving conflicts to include: 1) examine what is causing trouble between two people and interfering with getting the job done; 2) bring two or more people together to look at the conflict; 3) help people to be clear about their expectations of each other; 4) break down the elements of the conflict so that the parties can deal with them one at a time; 5) learn how to use constructive feedback so that issues do not pile up and end in underlying, difficult-to-get-at conflicts.

While there are many different models of conflict and resolution, they all seem to share four similar elements: antecedent events, circumstances which precipitate the manifest conflict, the conflict behavior of the participants, and the consequences of the conflict. It is also useful to think of conflict as being cyclical in nature; the residue of one conflict becomes a part of the antecedent events of the next conflict (see Figure 2). Thus the term coined by Walton (1969), "malevolent cycling" provides an appropriate description of the escalating nature of unresolved or poorly resolved conflicts.

The role of conflict, traditionally shaded by negative connotations, assumed that (1) it is by definition avoidable, that

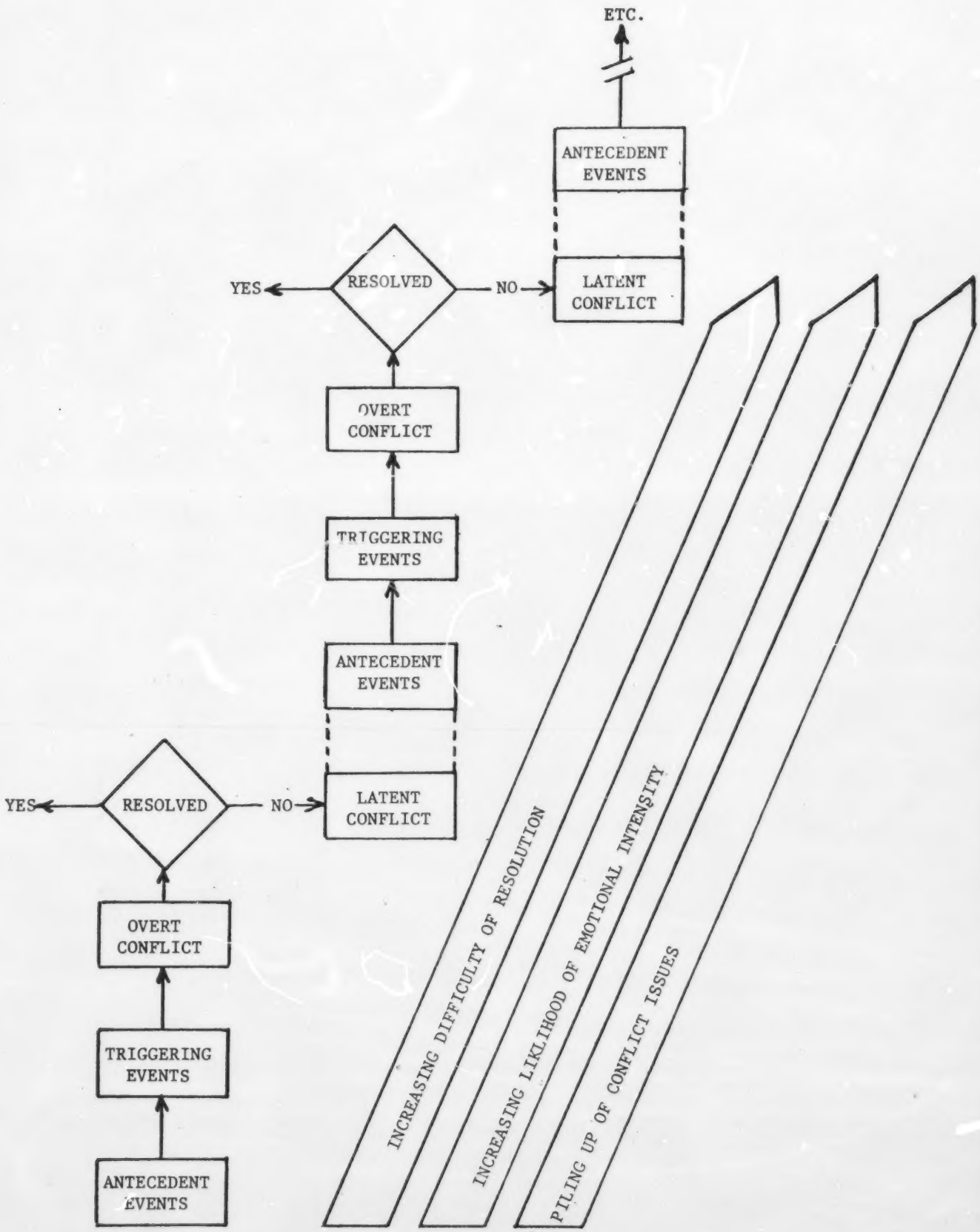

Fig. 2. The Cycling Nature of Unresolved Conflict

(2) conflict was caused by "troublemakers" or "boat-rockers" and (3) legalistic forms of resolution (such as going through proper channels or sticking to the rules) or reliance on authority or expertise were valued as appropriate. However, an emerging set of assumptions, more realistic in nature, seem to be gradually replacing these traditional ones: (1) conflict is inevitable, (2) conflict is determined by the nature of the relationship between individuals and their respective values and goals, (3) conflict is an inherent part of change, and (4) a minimal (and optimal) level of conflict is necessary (Luthans, 1977). That is, a minimal level of conflict may: increase motivation and energy to perform required tasks; increase the innovativeness of individuals because of the greater diversity of viewpoints; aid the individual in understanding his/her own position; and provide a means of managing the participant's own internal conflicts (Walton, 1969).

Merry and Allerhand (1977), offering some notions about conflict which parallel the latter-emerging assumptions, believe that all groups, teams, etc., have conflicts or tensions among their members. In fact, the longer members of a group have been working together, the greater is the probability of their having conflicts. That is, unresolved conflicts tend to be additive. Most often conflicts arise when people do not relate to each other in an open and honest manner. The implication here is

that persons with differing opinions, attitudes and values can still resolve many of the conflicts that may occur if they relate to each other in appropriate ways. Most conflicts of short duration can be dealt with best by the original parties if they are aware of appropriate methods of conflict resolution. However, conflicts of a longer duration may require external intervention (e.g., third-party mediation, due process hearings, etc.) to reach a solution.

Strategies

Some basic strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflict may be grouped according to their likely outcomes. These are shown in Figure 3. These strategies or styles are essentially determined by the balance between the intent to satisfy one's own needs and the intent to satisfy the other person's needs.

Win-Lose. A win-lose strategy is a very common way of dealing with conflict. Its frequent use reflects its harmony with the more traditional concepts of conflict. It is suggested that this strategy is counterproductive as it relies on dominance through power, authority or expertise. Typical methods in win-lose includes ignoring, unilateral decisions, intimidation, and power plays.

Lose-Lose. This style is based on the notion that "something --anything--is better than nothing." In its extreme, lose-lose

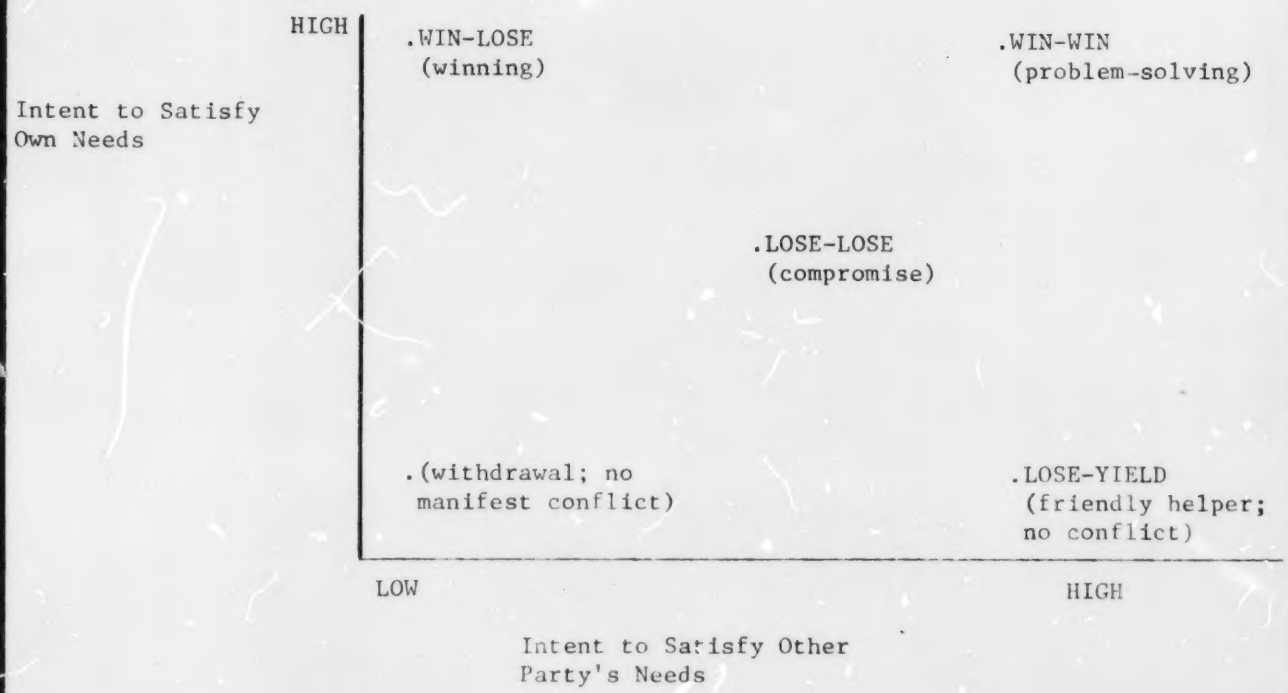

Fig. 3. Outcomes of personal conflicts based on intents. (Adapted from Filley, House & Kerr, 1976)

represents the attitude, "anything, so long as the other party does not realize its goals." Behaviors include compromise, resort to rules, or resort to third-party intervention. Typically, the parties disagree about the solutions and compromise is imposed by rules, mediation or arbitration.

Both of these strategies have some common and undesirable characteristics (Filley, House and Kerr, 1976, pp. 166-167):

1. There is a clear we-they distinction between the parties.
2. Parties direct their energies toward each other in an atomosphere of victory and defeat.
3. Parties see the issue from their own point of view.
4. The emphasis is on solutions rather than on the attainment of goals, values or objectives.
5. Conflicts are personalized and judgmental.
6. There is no differentiation of conflict-resolving activities from other group processes, nor is there a planned sequence of those activities.
7. The parties take a short-run view of the issues.

Win-Win. A third strategy, distinctly different from the above two, involves consensus and integrated decision-making, and is essentially described by the problem-solving approach. The intent is to reach a mutual decision which attempts to meet the needs of both parties. Compromise is undoubtly necessary, but it is compromise which originates within the context of the needs of the involved parties.

Consensus decisions occur when a group of two or more people who are dealing with a judgmental issue reach a decision which is not unacceptable to anyone. Research suggests that in many cases a consensus decision is better than the best individual decision (Hall, 1971).

Integrated decision-making involves a joint identification of the values, needs, and goals of the involved parties; a thorough search for alternative solutions which, to some degree, will meet these goals; and a mutual selection of the "best" alternative. The "best" alternative is that which will satisfy both parties. Not that it is the best solution in an absolute sense, but given the realities of the situation, the one which is most satisfying to the parties involved. This process should be familiar--essentially it is a generic problem-solving model. However, its relevance is enhanced when one notes that conflicts typically occur because of disagreement on the empahsis on two (or more) solutions, which may be the result of viewing the problem differently. Integrated decision-making techniques attempt to transform solution-minded situations into problem-oriented situations.

Implications in the Choice of Strategies

Not only are there differences in the methods of resolving conflict between these three strategies but qualitative differences in the nature of the solution may be noted. In the win-lose

paradigm the solution is likely to do one of two things (from the loser's perspective): it may result in frustration and feelings of anger, making future conflicts more likely and more intense. Or it may result in passivity. Here the probability of future overt conflict is reduced as the two parties assume a type of friendly helper relationship. While overt conflict may not exist, this type of relationship does not provide a healthy basis for parent-school interaction. In the lose-lose strategy, compromise is reached by imposition; neither party feels any ownership of the solution. Commitment to implement and follow through with the solution is likely to be low.

In the win-win style, since compromise is the result of a mutual decision, both parties "own" the solution. Not only is commitment likely to be greater but the parties have established a healthy basis for further interaction.

Resolving conflicts within the process of the IEP is only one of several available alternatives. Others include mediation, due process hearing and litigation in state or federal courts. An assumption which now becomes explicit is that it is more useful to resolve conflicts through interaction of the immediate parties rather than through any of the alternative routes.

Previously discussed were the advantages of a win-win approach to conflict resolution. As noted in Figure 4, the win-win style is possible when two conflicting parties attempt to resolve their

Nature of Resolution of Conflict	Characteristics	Strategy of Resolution
Within ongoing IEP process	Potential for consensus to be reached by involved parties	Win-Win is possible (conflict resolved)
Mediation	Compromise suggested by external source	Lose-Lose likely (conflict remains)
Due Process Hearing	Decision imposed by an impartial hearing officer	Win-Lose likely (conflict remains)
Court Proceedings (litigations)	Decision imposed by a judge	Win-Lose assured (conflict remains)

Fig. 4. Alternate ways of resolving differences in the IEP process and likely strategies of resolution

differences. When they do not, resolution becomes only a remote possibility in any of the other settings, because the lose-lose or win-lose styles become highly probable.

Figure 5 provides a diagrammatic representation of the various routes available in resolving conflicts in the IEP process. Note, however, that each time an impasse is encountered, additional persons (and instructions) are introduced into the process. Consequently the solution, whatever it is, becomes increasingly distant from the original parties.

The following are offered as advantages of the resolution of problems by the school and parents working together:

1. Ownership of, and thus commitment to, the solution.
2. Maintenance of a win-win climate.
3. Maintenance of the integrity of the school-parent relationship.
4. Savings in time and money.
5. Conflict is resolved; does not become latent conflict to become additive to next antecedent event.
6. Solution is close to parties involved.
7. It is more likely that an appropriate educational plan can be developed.

This is not to say that the alternative channels of resolution are inherently inferior, nor should it be inferred that solutions arrived at via other channels are necessarily less effective. But

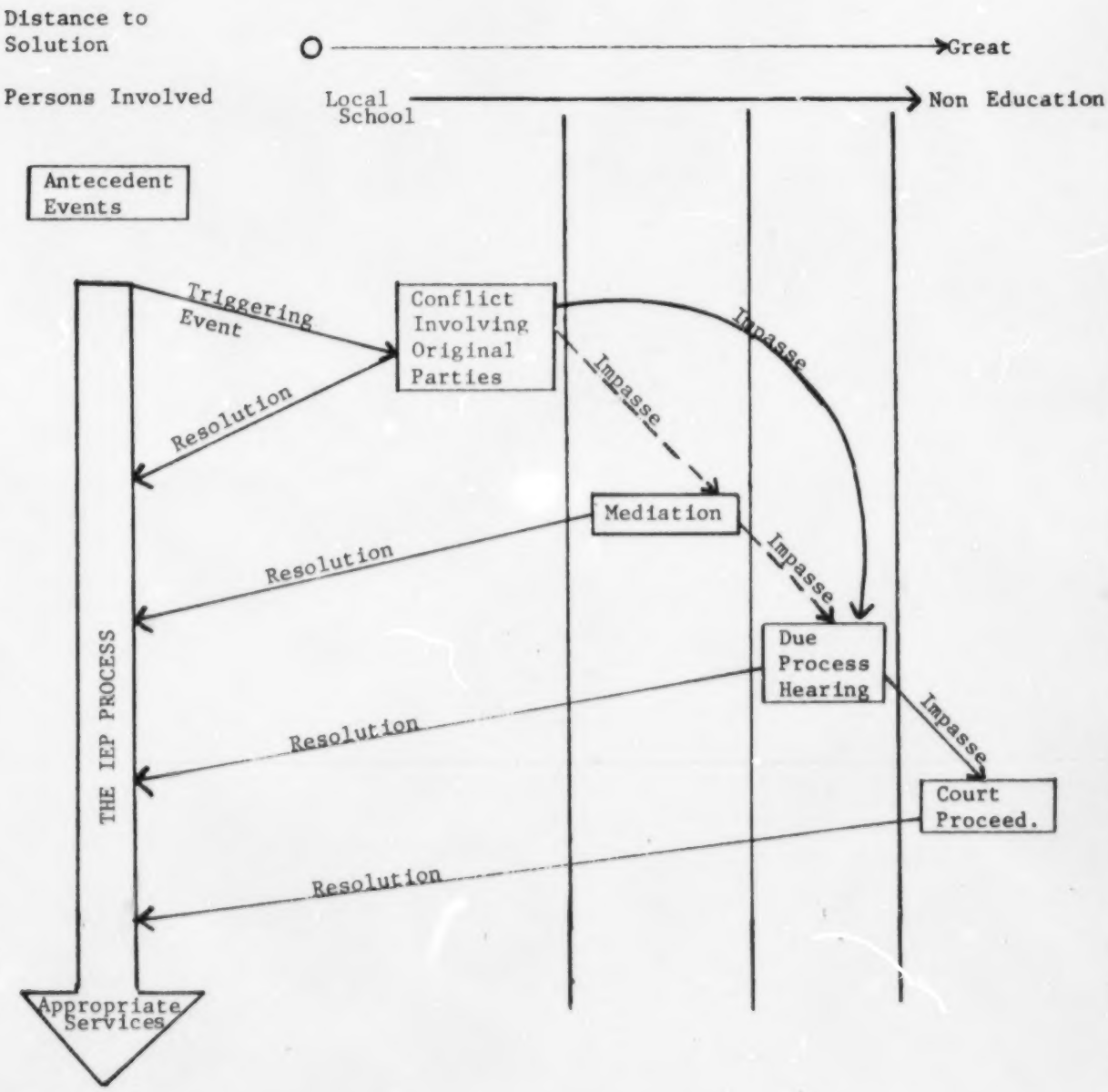

Fig. 5. Conflict resolution and the IEP process

in choosing to use third-party mediation, due process hearings or litigation, there will be costs, both tangible and intangible, to the parents, to the school, and undoubtedly to the child.

A Problem-Solving Model

In order to adequately identify the issues in a conflict situation a distinction must be made between substantive and interpersonal issues, as they are typcially resolved in somewhat different ways. Resolving differences on the substantive level (e.g., what is the appropriate placement for this child?) is essentially a problem-solving sequence. Dealing with associated feelings (e.g., I don't want my child in the same class with those children) requires quite different skills--active listening, analytic listening, empathy, and ability to sensitively probe, to name a few.

It is possible to snythesize these two approaches into an integrated problem-solving model (see Figure 6) which is adapted from Morris and Sashkin (1976). It is a problem-solving strategy as it follows the same sequence of steps as in the basic scientific model (problem defintion, solution generation, solution selection, implementation, and evalution). But it also integrates a sequence of interpersonal relation elements into the problem-solving procedure. By combining both strategies, one (theoretically) has the capability, or at least the awareness necessary to deal with substantive and interpersonal issues.

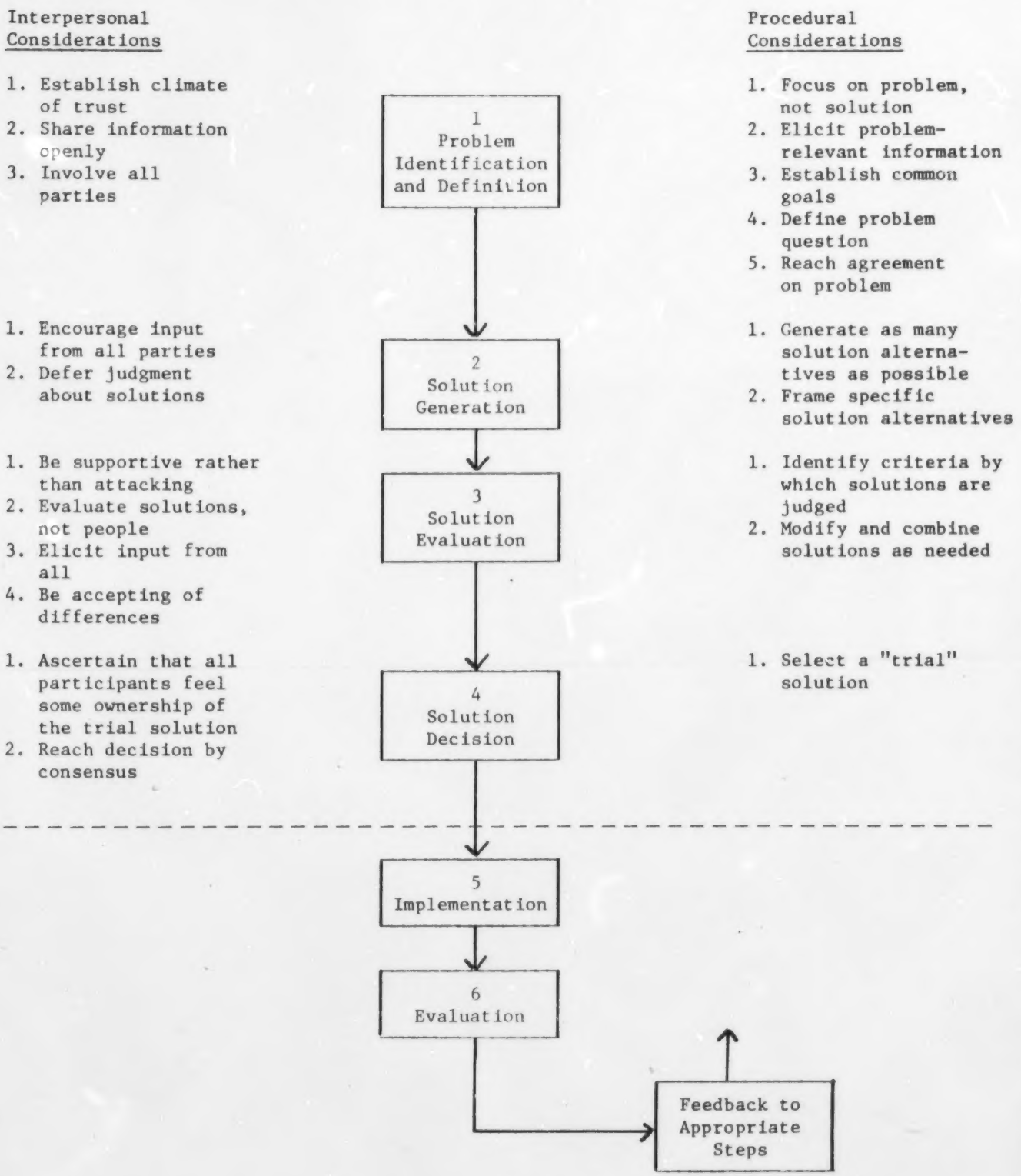
Interpersonal Considerations
1. Establish climate of trust
2. Share information openly
3. Involve all parties
Procedural Considerations
1. Focus on problem, not solution
2. Elicit problem-relevant information
3. Establish common goals
4. Define problem question
5. Reach agreement on problem
1 Problem Identification and Definition
1. Encourage input from all parties
2. Defer judgment about solutions
1. Generate as many solution alternatives as possible
2. Frame specific solution alternatives
2 Solution Generation
1. Be supportive rather than attacking
2. Evaluate solutions, not people
3. Elicit input from all
4. Be accepting of differences
1. Identify criteria by which solutions are judged
2. Modify and combine solutions as needed
3 Solution Evaluation
1. Ascertain that all participants feel some ownership of the trial solution
2. Reach decision by consensus
1. Select a "trial" solution
4 Solution Decision
5 Implementation
6 Evaluation
Feedback to Appropriate Steps

Fig. 6 The integrated problem-solving model

Step 1. Problem Identification and Definition

The process of problem solving begins with the problem. While this statement may seem obvious in a discussion of problem solving, it needs to be stated. Frequently it is assumed that the problem is known, and one proceeds directly to the business of solving it when neither party understands the problem in the same way. It is fair to say that most conflicts are disagreements about solutions. If there is no agreement on the nature of the problem it is unlikely that there will be a subsequent consensus on a solution.

The important procedural elements are (1) to not assume that everyone knows what the problem is but rather to encourage people to share their information about the problem. As one elicits information about the nature of the problem it is important to consider historical and contextual events. Information related to questions such as: What are some factors which may have caused the problem? What has happened up to the present time that is related to the problem? What is the present situation related to the problem? How did the problem develop? If the problem has a long history, what has kept it from being solved in the past? How are the involved parties affected by the problem? The list of questions, which is not exhaustive, is given only to emphasis the importance of obtaining as much information as possible about the problem before proceeding to other activities. It is also important to (2) identify the goals of the involved parties and (3) if possible, agree on some shared goals. Agreeing on some shared goals at this point in the

problem solving procedure will facilitate consensus on the "best" solution at a later stage. Finally, (4) there should be agreement on the problem definition.

The following guidelines are helpful in formulating the problem definition (Heun and Heun, 1975).

1. The problem, or source of disagreement should be stated as a question. This tends to encourage inquiry rather than advocacy.
2. The problem question should be stated in an unbiased way and should avoid emotional language.
3. The problem question should be clear and concise. It should also tend to be toward the specific end of the global-specific continuum.
4. A problem question should be multisided. Avoid problem questions which can be answered with a yes or no.
5. Do not state a solution in the problem question. For example: "What is the most appropriate classroom placement for Johnny" is preferable to "Should Johnny be placed in a self-contained classroom" as a problem statement.

In order for this process to take place certain interpersonal events should occur. It is important that information be openly shared, which implies that there is an atmosphere of trust between

the participants. One should understand his or her own attitudes, values and biases that may distort the understanding of the position of others. If possible these should be shared with the other participants. This trusting relationship may already exist because of past, positive interactions, or it may begin from a step in good faith by both parties.

In general, people tend to be solution-oriented. This is often at the expense of adequately defining the problem, as described above. Many wonderful solutions can be generated that have little relationship to the real problem.

The main procedural trap to avoid in the first step is the assumption that all parties know what the problem is. Attempts should be made to establish an atmosphere in which free exchanging of ideas and information can occur. It is crucial that all parties have input at the step. Research has shown that if a person hesitates to become involved in this early stage, that person will be less likely to communicate during later stages.

It is most useful to work at the tasks within each step until the objectives of that step are accomplished. Depending on the nature of the problem and the parties involved, the emphasis and amount of time spent on each step will vary.

Step 2. Solution Generation

Once the problem has been adequately defined and it is commonly understood by the participants, the next task is to identify

potential solution alternatives. Another ramification of the solution-orientation attitude is that often the first or second solution that is suggested is selected--without considering that there may be other and perhaps better alternatives. Two important procedural events should occur: first, attempt to generate as many solution alternatives as possible, realizing that it is rarely possible to examine or even to list all viable solutions in the real life situation. Second, alternative solutions should be specific. Often the generation of solutions will begin with more general ideas which should then be refined to be more specific.

In the interpersonal realm, again, input should be encouraged from all parties. At this point all suggestions are to be accepted without judgment. This step should be like a "brainstorming" session, and it may prove useful to some of the common brainstorming stategies at this point. For example, Heun and Heun (1975) suggest:

1. No criticism (verbal or nonverbal) is allowed
2. Quantity of ideas is the objective
3. Building from, combining, or suggesting variations of earlier ideas is encouraged.

Step 3. Solution Evaluation

Once an adequate list of solution alternatives has been generated, the merits of each are considered. At the beginning of this step, the participants should try to establish some criteria that may be used to judge the solution alternatives. If there was agreement on

some common goals during the earlier part of the problem-solving procedure, these goals (as is, or refined) may serve as the criteria.

Solutions are to be critically evaluated, not people. However, it is very difficult to separate the idea from the individual; to attaak ones idea is usually seen as an attack on the individual who sponsored it. One should anticipate and accept that there likely will be interpersonal differences at this point because the main task is to make primarily subjective judgments about potential solutions. Differences can be minimized (1) if there is trust and good faith on the part of both parties, (2) if there are some common criteria by which solutions can be evaluated, (3) if one is careful to separate criticism of the idea from criticism of the individual and (4) if one concentrates on the positive aspects of the various solutions rather than chiefly on the negative.

Step 4. Solution Decision

The solution decision step is probably not discreet, but is rather the culmination of the activities described in Step 3. However it is treated separately in order to highlight the key concept of decision making by consensus. In the context of problem solving, consensus refers to the situation when a decision is reached by agreement of the involved parties. While consensus may not always occur, it remains a worthy goal. The advantages of a solution reached by consensus have already been suggested in the discussion of the win-win style of conflict resolution. The

likelihood of making a decision by consensus at this point is increased if the group has been able to agree on some common goals (Step 1) and perhaps some additional critieria by which solutions are judged (Step 3), and if there is agreement on what the problem really is (Step 1).

Generally, problem solving strategy models also include the additional important steps of the implementation of the selected solution and the evaluation of its efficacy. Then, through feedback to the appropriate steps, the problem solving process can continue. These additional steps are a part of Figure 6, but will not be treated in any detail in this paper. When applying problem-solving activities to issues within the IEP process, the steps of implementation and evaluation and feedback are incorporated into the ongoing IEP activities of determination of annual goals, short term objectives, educational activities, etc. (implementation), and annual reviews (evaluation and feedback).

This approach--problem solving with a win-win attitude--is not without liabilities. It will not work if it is an unilateral effort. There must be reciporcation. Trust and openness should be met with trust and openness. All participants must attempt to understand the other party's perspective. Consensus by its very nature requires compromise. Recall that the solution reached is the 'best' in a relative sense; ideally there may be better solutions for each party. However, from the handicapped child's

point-of-view, the long term ideal situation is to have his/her parents working closely with educators to provide appropriate educational activities. This ideal is best and most quickly achieved when parents and educators can work through and resolve issues as they occur as a team instead of as opponents.

There are problems in presenting any phenomena as a model since the effect is often that of oversimplification. The interaction process between any two people is complex, as each one must consider, consciously or otherwise, information from the many different channels of communication. Moreover, these skills are not necessarily intuitive notwithstanding the fact that the use of language is acquired very early in life. The ability of parents and schools to communicate is crucial because the result of those interactions helps define educational services for children. Undoubtedly, the quality of overall services received by a child is related to the quality of the relationship between his/her parents and the school.

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